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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 70th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 23 May 2000 at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
*later:* Mr. Darwish (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Egypt)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 118: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations** (*continued*)

*Reports of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (continued)* (A/54/764, A/54/817 and A/54/836)

1. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba), referring to the follow-up review of the programme and administrative practices of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) prepared by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) (A/54/764), said that the report reflected improvements and progress in the Centre's mission, activities and programme of work. She attached particular importance to the implementation of the new information technology strategy, the regionalization policy and training activities. However, she was concerned about the continuing shortage of resources, which was a basic problem that affected all the Centre's activities. She therefore noted with interest the proposals concerning regular budget funding for activities such as the management training programme. In the light of the outcome of the review of the Centre's work programme, the General Assembly should consider carefully the possibility of appropriating regular budget resources for the Centre's activities, particularly since it expressed concern each year about the shortage of resources and its effect on the implementation of the Centre's mandates.

2. With respect to the reference, in paragraph 27 of the OIOS report, to the delegation of authority, she asked for confirmation that the steps being taken were strictly in line with the relevant General Assembly decisions. An appropriate accountability mechanism must be put in place prior to any further delegation of authority. Lastly, the report should be considered by the Second Committee, in accordance with General Assembly decisions to the effect that substantive reports on programme activities should be considered by the relevant bodies.

3. Many of those observations also applied to the follow-up to the 1996 review of the programme and administrative practices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (A/54/817). Once again, she welcomed the progress made in activities, but was concerned about the difficulties caused by a shortage of resources. Considering the need for adequate and predictable resources, the General Assembly should carefully consider the situation in relation to the funding of the environmental activities carried out by UNEP with a view to the possible appropriation of regular budget resources. She asked whether the recommendation contained in paragraph 57 of the OIOS report, concerning the delegation of authority to senior managers, was compatible with General Assembly decisions concerning the delegation of authority. She also asked for clarification of the link between programme planning and budgeting, which was mentioned in paragraph 61. The Second Committee should consider the OIOS report on UNEP, as well as the one on Habitat.

4. With respect to the OIOS audit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Field Operation in Rwanda (A/54/836), she shared the concerns expressed at the preceding meeting about the lack of internal controls in that operation. Paragraph 1 of the note by the Secretary-General seemed to indicate that the OIOS report was being transmitted for information purposes only, yet paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 54/244 had clearly directed the Secretary-General to transmit OIOS reports to the General Assembly for its consideration and action. The matter should be taken up in informal consultations. Lastly, the report had been lengthened unnecessarily by the fact that the annex to the report, which contained the observations of OHCHR, repeated the recommendations listed in chapter VII.

5. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that he wished to commend the dedicated, visionary and forceful leadership provided by the Acting Executive Director of Habitat, as well as the decisive measures taken to enhance the effectiveness of the Centre's financial and management performance. He hoped that the next OIOS report on the Centre would reflect tangible improvements in those areas.

6. **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that he had been astonished by the findings of the report on the OHCHR Field Operation in Rwanda (A/54/836), particularly those mentioned in paragraphs 15, 20 and 22, and by the fact that OIOS had not disclosed who had been responsible for those irregularities, despite the seriousness of the problems it had identified. OHCHR seemed to be hiding behind the fact that the Rwanda operation had been its first field

mission, and yet, for that very reason, it should have assigned its best staff members. He asked whether there were any compelling reasons why the irregularities described had been allowed to take place.

7. *Mr. Darwish (Egypt), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

8. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that he shared the concerns of the Tanzanian delegation. Since his Government attached great importance to the need to strengthen accountability, it would like to know what steps had been taken with respect to the managers and officers involved in the irregularities in the Rwanda operation.

9. **Ms. Abrenica** (Office of Internal Oversight Services) said, with respect to the delegation of authority in UNEP, that the Executive Director had given managers the authority to take decisions on financial and personnel administration, just as the Executive Director himself had been authorized by Headquarters to take administrative and financial decisions. In the Executive Director's absence, or in the day-to-day discharge of their duties, programme managers were authorized to recruit staff, authorize travel and otherwise decide how to spend some of the funds allocated to their projects.

10. **Ms. Celik** (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements) said that the Centre appreciated the OIOS report, which had given it clear guidance. With respect to the recommendation on resource mobilization (A/54/764, para. 75), voluntary contributions had been rising steadily and were expected to reach $4 million or more in 2000. With respect to the recommendation in paragraph 77, the Centre had upgraded its computer hardware and had finalized an information technology strategy. In cooperation with the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the Information Technology Services Division at Headquarters, it was focusing particularly on the use of Lotus Notes as the core technical tool for the Centre's electronic institutional memory. The system would be put in place in the summer of 2000. Regarding the staffing of services to support and strengthen information management, the Centre would try to redeploy existing posts before it sought to mobilize additional resources.

11. With respect to paragraph 79, all senior management posts within the new organizational structure had been reclassified and advertised under the 100 series of the Staff Rules. The closing date for the receipt of applications for the posts of Chief of each of the three regional offices had been 17 May 2000. For most of the remaining senior management posts the departmental panels had submitted their reports and their recommendations were being reviewed by the relevant advisory bodies on appointment and promotion. New job descriptions had been prepared for all mid-level management posts, and the process of classifying those posts had been initiated. UNON was cooperating in the task of reviewing all posts and deciding whether they came under the 100 or the 200 series of the Staff Rules. All new recruitment was carried out in strict accordance with the relevant guidelines and procedures. Lastly, with respect to paragraph 81, monthly meetings were held between management and staff representatives, and staff had shown increased support for the Centre's new focus and work methods.

12. **Mr. Sniffen** (United Nations Environment Programme) said that UNEP took the recommendations of OIOS very seriously and had already taken steps to implement them. In reply to the question on resources for training and staff development which the Ugandan delegation had posed at the previous meeting, he said that such training was usually provided under the auspices of the UNON Human Resources Management Service. With respect to specialized training in the technical areas of the Programme's work, UNEP encouraged staff to take advantage either of the Organization's sabbatical leave programme, under which a number of staff members had taken advanced and accelerated courses, or of the expansion of informal networks in the Programme's areas of expertise as a result of its participation in meetings of experts.

13. In reply to the representative of Cuba, he said that the task force recommended in paragraph 61 of the OIOS report (A/54/817) had been established, and UNEP, Habitat and UNON staff were working to determine how better use could be made of UNON services. The harmonization of programme planning and budgeting was the responsibility of the Programme Coordination and Management Unit, which worked closely with OIOS and the Programme Planning and Budget Division at Headquarters to ensure that programme planning and budget monitoring were parallel processes, and with UNON to ensure that resources for planning were available to the Environment Fund.

14. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the OHCHR management in Geneva recognized that many things had gone wrong with the Rwanda operation. For that very reason, the current High Commissioner had requested the audit two years earlier and had taken urgent corrective measures, as noted in the annex to the OIOS report (A/54/836).

15. OHCHR had addressed and would continue to address the implementation of each of the recommendations made by OIOS. It had introduced substantive changes and issued extensive instructions to all of its field offices, and had commissioned audit reports of each field office to head off problems such as those encountered in the Rwanda operation. Wherever possible, OHCHR had pursued recoveries from the organizations and individuals responsible for the irregularities in the Rwanda operation. It was important to note that the OIOS report contained no allegations of fraud and no evidence that large-scale losses had been incurred; the problems under discussion must be viewed in proportion. Only a week earlier, the Chief of the OHCHR Administrative Section, who had been responsible for oversight during the period of the Rwanda operation, had been replaced. To ensure that such problems did not recur, OHCHR had asked the Under-Secretary-General for Management to approve the transfer of staff with administrative and financial expertise to its Administrative Section to provide the core capacity needed to address structural problems. Proposals for strengthening that area would be requested in the context of the next programme budget, as OHCHR became increasingly operational. In the meantime OHCHR was engaging, with the Rwandan Government, in a project to support the national human rights commission on the ground.

16. **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania) said he was not convinced that no large-scale irregularities had taken place in the Rwanda operation, since $1 million had been spent without the knowledge or authorization of OHCHR management. He remained concerned about the failure to hold anyone accountable for those problems. He asked whether the former Chief of the Administrative Section was still working in OHCHR or elsewhere in the United Nations system. He recalled that, when comparable irregularities had occurred at Habitat some years earlier, the persons responsible, including the former Executive Director, had paid the price. It was intriguing to note that OIOS itself failed to mention who was responsible for the problems it had found. The serious offences that had been committed could not be taken lightly.

**Agenda item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001** (*continued*)

*Administrative and financial issues concerning the Non-Governmental Organizations Section (continued)* (A/54/520/Add.1 and A/54/868)

17. **Mr. Demir** (Turkey) said that, since a member of the Turkish delegation was currently chairing the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, he had had the opportunity to confirm the need for more staff and technical support in the Non-Governmental Organizations Section. Hundreds of non-governmental organizations were in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and hundreds of applications for consultative status remained to be reviewed. The Fifth Committee should therefore endorse the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Advisory Committee's report (A/54/868). While he attached great importance to the comprehensive report on the administrative and management implications of the large increase in the number of non-governmental organizations involved in the work of the United Nations, which the Advisory Committee had requested in paragraph 6 of its report, he felt that the submission of that report and the need to strengthen the Non-Governmental Organizations Section were two separate issues that should not be linked.

18. **Mr. Adam** (Israel) recalled that, at the main part of the fifty-fourth session, his delegation had emphasized the need to support and strengthen the Non-Governmental Organizations Section. He therefore supported the proposal, contained in paragraph 5 of the Secretary-General's report (A/54/520/Add.1) and endorsed in paragraph 4 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/54/868), to establish two additional posts in the Section. He reiterated his delegation's concern about the Section's immense workload, and reaffirmed the importance it attached to the current and future participation of non-governmental organizations and civil society in the work of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

*The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.*